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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
   """""""""""""""""""""""""""

It's been one of those weeks in which I just don't have much of an idea
of what to talk/write about this week. We're finally over that intense
snowstorm last weekend, and we're in for some Arctic cold this weekend.
Looks like I had better make some plans to stay busy over the next few
days! Hmmm, maybe I'll hook up that Flashback console!

Just what I need these days is another "hobby" of sorts. When my wife's
father passed away a few months ago, he left behind a gun collection.
So now we've been given the task of disposing of it. As a result, we've
both had to take a firearms safety course in order to obtain permits
which will allow us to transport them in an attempt to sell them. Part
of the training requires actual hands-on, including some shooting. I've
had a little experience with firearms when I was younger, but my wife had
never touched a gun. It was a long day, but fun. As a result of getting
"reacquainted" with firearms, I joined the gun club that sponsored the
course. We'll probably keep a couple of my father-in-law's guns to do
some target shooting. I'm actually looking forward to this new hobby; I
always enjoyed it as a kid, and I was actually pretty good at it in those
days! So, we just have to take the second half of the course, a session
dealing with firearms laws, given by the local constabulary. Then we'll
apply for our permits and wait. Too many hobbies...

So, meanwhile, we'll be watching the thermometer drop like a rock over
the next few days. Play a little Asteroids on the Flashback, maybe an
Atari classic or two on the PC, and then watch the Patriots reach the
Super Bowl! Hey, that's winter in New England!

Until next time...

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                        PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                       compiled by Joe Mirando
                         joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone without a
lot of activity in the NewsGroup, but we're going to try to make a

column out of it anyway. I can remember a time when it was a matter of
having too many posts to fit into a single column. Back in the STReport
days, Ralph used to call and yell at me because my column was so long.

Ahhh... those were the days. There were new apps coming out all the
time, shows in Asheville, Virginia, Boston, Pasadena, etc.

There were even new machines from Atari and add-ons from independent
developers, programs galore, and the geniuses in our world were content
to stay the heck out of politics.

Before you have a stroke, let me point out one thing... I
said 'geniuses'... I've never claimed to be a genius. [grin]

Anyway, since there's so little actual Atari computer news around these
days, I'm going to delve into politics a bit. But don't worry. It won't
be too painful.

If you're like me (and you probably are... I'm dead-average), you heard
about this seven-or-eight-disk "TAF" setup that would allow you to surf
the World Wide Web just like those jerks with PCs or Macs.

The deal was that, to be able to use a TCP/IP stack, you had to forsake
TOS altogether. What was needed was an operating system that had this
particular communications protocol built in, and then you had to find a
browser.

Okay. MiNT solved both of these problems. There was a TCP/IP stack
available, and there was a browser called Chimera that would run under
X-Windows, which would run on MiNT.

Okay. Sound confusing? You ain't heard nothin' yet! In order to set up
this particular set of beasties, you had to format a partition of your
hard drive in MINIX FS. MINIX, I quickly found out, was a combination
of the words Minimal and Unix.

Well, some people didn't have the hard drive space to spare, but I had a
spiffy new (at the time) SyQuest removable drive. So I could spare a
cartridge to test this puppy out. Well, I never got the setup working
as well as it should have. Something about the system kept corrupting
the data on the SyQuest cartridge. I tested about a dozen different
possibilities... bad connections, bad cartridges, bad configurations,
bad <fill-in-the-blank>, nothing alleviated the problem.

While it worked, yes, it worked okay. It was slow, and it was monochrome
only, but it worked. Then something would corrupt the hard drive
partition and I'd have to start over. But that was a learning
experience too.

So, you're probably asking, where's the "politics" part, right?

Well, MINIX was developed by Andrew Tanenbaum. Dr. Tanenbaum is an
amazing guy. He's written some really top-level books on computing from
networking to distributed computing. Most of these books are considered
the de facto text books on their respective subjects. Not too shabby,
huh? Eventually, he moved to the Netherlands, where he teaches.

Well, okay, that's not quite political. I guess you could make it
political by saying he left his native land to go to another country,
but I gather he did that because of his wife's work, not for a

political reason.

Okay, fast-forward to 2004. Me, being the keen observer of politics that
I am, found this neat website that kept track of past and current
public opinion polls, and how the current electoral vote (remember the
Electoral College snafu of 2000?). I found the site to be very
even-handed, the commentary to be straight-forward and, while the
author made very little effort to hid is preferences, he was always
even-handed and fair. I was quite impressed... both with the site, and
with the author.

So what's the connection, you may ask... as well you may... Well, the
site (http://www.electoral-vote.com) is run by none other than
Andrew 'Andy' Tanenbaum. I didn't know that at the time, but when I
found out who he was and that MINIX was his brainchild, I was muy
impressed.

So if you want to take a look at the current state of U.S. politics and
want to be assured of spin-free data and straight-forward
information... AND keep your hand in a little tiny bit of Atari
history, go ahead and take a look. I don't know of a better site for
info and insight without a lot of bluster and blow.

Okay, let's take a step back and see if we can wring a little bit of
info out of the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Guillaume Tello asks about how to do a screen dump using the SPECTRE Mac
Emulator:

"Does anyone know how to make a screen dump under Spectre CGR (while
running in Mac mode) ?

Is there a key combination? A tool?"

Ian McCall tells Guillaume:

"The standard Mac keyboard shortcut for a full-screen dump is
command-shift 3 (apple-shift 3) - that shortcut has been there since
forever, and I'm pretty sure it was still there in System 6 which is
most likely what you're running. Not sure what the Apple key maps to on
the ST, but have a go with that."

Guillaume replies:

"Thanks, this worked! But now, I have two images files on a Mac Floppy
disk...

Is there an utility to copy files from a MAC volume to a ST one?

TRANSV451 from Spectre hangs on my Mega STE...

I found a solution: I used a ZIP 100Mb formatted as a Mac volume. It is
accepted by Spectre and by my PC with TRANSMAC.EXE. So I can copy files

in both ways."

Edward Baiz tells us that his CT63 is on its way:

"Received an email last week that my CT63 will finally be coming. That
is great news for me as I was so used to the speed and memory of the
Hades060. I just need the CTPCI upgrade and then my system will be
complete. I still have to put my Falcon motherboard in my old Hades
tower. I have mostly everything I need to extend the ports and such. I
am still looking for some kin of plastic part to use to install Effiel
Interface I got from Rory of SCAT."

Jonathan Kay asks for help backing up his Discovery Pack Language Disk:

"I'm in the process of backing my ST disks up to my PC. I've been
trying to copy the files from the Discovery Pack Language Disk & I was
wondering if anyone knows if there is anywhere I can download a copy of
either a disk image for an emulator, or an archive of the files."

'Maraka' tells Jonathan:

"You can probably pick everything you need from the link below
http://www.vintagecomputercafe.com/atarisystemdisks.htm "

'Chuck B' asks about his latest acquisition:

"I just got a ATARI PS3000 Monitor, any idea how rare it is? Or any
solid info about it?"

Bill Freeman tells Chuck:

"They are an excellent monitor and as I recall,   Sony built them.
They are fairly rare. I have one, or maybe two in my collection."

Bernd Maedicke asks Chuck:

"Do you have the manual for this monitor? I need it for my web page
http://x-com.atari.org/ "

Bill tells Bernd:

"Sorry but I bought it used and never had a manual for my PS3000.
You have a very good Atari Web site. Wish I could read German better."

Well folks, that's it for this week. We'll see if we can start whipping
the NewsGroups back into shape next week, but I'm afraid that messages
are going to get harder and harder to come by. It breaks my heart. It
just breaks my heart.

So, while you listen to that dry, creaking sound like splitting wood,
tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to
listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Kicking Off in 2008!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   'Burnout Paradise'

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
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              Slashing Kicks Off 2008 Gaming Releases

Video gamers, finally emerging from the pixilated haze brought on by last
year's bumper crop of best-selling titles, are now turning their
attention to upcoming releases.

Last year was one of the best in recent memory for the video game
industry, featuring a string of A-list titles such as "Halo 3," "Call of
Duty 4" and "Guitar Hero," causing some analysts to fret that 2007 will
prove a tough act to follow.

"People tend to forget there was some explosive growth, driven not only
by premium titles but ultra-premium titles like 'Guitar Hero', which cost
$100, and 'Rock Band', which cost $170," said Jesse Divnich, an analyst
with The simExchange, an online prediction market for game sales.

Still, quite a few games are poised to hit store shelves in the next
couple months. Here is just a sample of anticipated titles coming out for
Nintendo Co Ltd's Wii, Microsoft Corp's Xbox 360 and Sony Corp's
PlayStation 3.

"NO MORE HEROES" - WII - JAN 22 - UBISOFT

What it is: Play as a contract killer who acquires a light-saber-like
"beam katana" and proceeds to hunt down rival assassins in a bid to
become the undisputed top hitman.

Why you'll want it: It's made by Goichi Suda, a Japanese designer known
for quirky fare such as "Killer 7." His games feel like interactive
anime, and fans of martial arts films will revel in the stylishly bloody
action.

Reality check: The gruesomeness may repulse Wii owners drawn to the
console's family friendly image. Few developers outside of Nintendo have

made the Wii's motion controls work for something that doesn't involve rolling bowling balls or tossing darts.

"BURNOUT PARADISE" - XBOX 360, PS3 - JAN 22 - EA

What it is: The latest iteration of the popular racing game whose whole point is to drive with utter, reckless disregard for fellow motorists, forcing them to crash and causing as much damage as possible to any vehicles in the vicinity.

Why you'll want it: Realistic graphics and the ability to challenge other players online in an open-ended world prove this edition was designed from the ground up with this generation of powerful gaming machines in mind.

Reality check: Some fans of the series are dismayed at the open-world idea, and worry that it will make it too difficult to retry failed events.

"DEVIL MAY CRY 4" - XBOX 360, PS3 - FEB 5 - CAPCOM

What it is: Play a demon hunter who brings the pain to Hell's minions with his mighty sword, Red Queen, and double-barreled pistol, Blue Rose. String attacks together into spectacular combos that rack up your score and acquire even more impressive powers.

Why you'll want it: This is the first appearance of this Japanese action franchise on new game consoles and marks the first time Xbox owners can get their hands on the well-regarded series.

Reality check: Apart from prettier graphics, previews say the game doesn't seem to deviate much from the series' tried and true formula.

"SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL" - WII - MARCH 9 - NINTENDO

What it is: The long-awaited third edition of Nintendo's hugely successful fighting series. It's been nearly seven years since the last "Smash" title, and expectations are high that this game will be a, well, knock-out.

Why you'll want it: Pick from more than two dozen classic characters such as Mario, Zelda or Pikachu. Combining simple controls with a broad variety of characters, abilities and items, the game should appeal to casual and hard-core players. Wireless online play may jump-start Nintendo's gaming network.

Reality check: First, you have to get your hands on a Wii, which are still in short supply. That's about the only thing expected to hold back this game.

"LOST ODYSSEY" - XBOX 360 - FEB 12 - MICROSOFT

What it is: A role-playing game featuring an epic story of immortals exploring a magical world. The game was crafted by an all-star team of renowned Japanese talent including Hironobu Sakaguchi, producer of one of the most popular RPG franchises of all time, "Final Fantasy."

Why you'll want it: Critics are raving about the incredibly evocative story and the detailed art design.

Reality check: The turn-based combat system may feel tired to fans of the genre. The game is also very long, coming packed on four DVDs (the 2006 RPG hit "Oblivion" used a single disc) and contains a novel's worth of text and dialogue.

Video Game Review: 'Burnout Paradise'

Nothing gets in the way of having a smashing good time with "Burnout Paradise."

There are no magical walls or loading times within Electronic Arts' driving game, a next-generation reinvention of the "Burnout" series set on the open roads of Paradise City, a Los Angeles-like metropolis where the grass is green and the streets are busy. (Don't worry, Guns N' Roses fans. The classic "Paradise City" is indeed in the game.)

"Burnout Paradise" ($59.99 for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3) features more than 120 offline racing competitions, accessible at stoplights scattered across town. There are standard races, time trials, stunt runs and souped-up modes such as Showtime and Marked Man, which tasks players with crossing a finish line while psycho drivers attempt to annihilate their ride.

The superfluous Showtime mode invites drivers to catapult their car through the air and crash into anything that gets in the way, leaving a mind-bending wake of destruction that will surely be pleasing to everyone who ever abused their Tonka trunks and Matchbox cars as child. Bonus points for hitting buses!

Gorgeous is an odd word to describe the highly detailed slow-motion car crashes repeatedly featured in "Burnout Paradise," but that's just why the destructive carnage is in high definition. Windows cracking, fenders flying, tires blowing and hoods crunching are crisp at 60 frames per second.

The splendor, however, doesn't extend to any sort of a story line.

"Burnout Paradise" lacks a narrative, instead opting for an annoying DJ who instructs players between tunes from artists like LCD Soundsystem, Seether and Jane's Addiction. Driving without a destination could lead to Boringville, but "Burnout Paradise" revs up its nonlinear format thanks to the massive driving environment of Paradise City, completely unlocked from the start.

The immense map and the city's look-alike downtown streets may confuse gamers with even the most heightened senses of direction, especially when being chased at speeds of more than 150 mph. However, the deep multiplayer component of "Burnout Paradise" makes up for such a sharp learning curve.

With the push of just three buttons, players can seamlessly speed online to unleash their virtual road rage on other players without even having to step out of their car. Cooperative online challenges add a social aspect to "Burnout Paradise" that's almost as exhaustive as Facebook.

The pile-up is enriched with the ability to use a PlayStation Eye or Xbox Live Vision camera to capture a virtual license photo or snap opposing

players' mugshots after brutal takedowns. Sounds silly, but such a small
detail within Paradise City's huge landscape makes "Burnout Paradise"
feel like the most complete online racing experience out on the road
today.

Four stars out of four.

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                    A-ONE's Headline News
              The Latest in Computer Technology News
                  Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

              MySpace Agrees to New Safety Measures

MySpace reached an agreement with legal authorities in 49 states on
changing its social networking Web site to help prevent sexual predators
and others from misusing it, state officials said Monday.

Several states' attorneys general said in a statement that Myspace will
add several protections and participate in a working group to develop new
technologies, including a way to verify the ages of users. Other social
networking sites will be invited to participate.

MySpace, which is owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., also will accept
independent monitoring and changes the structure of its site.

The agreement was announced in Manhattan by attorneys general from New
Jersey, North Carolina, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York.

"The Internet can be a dangerous place for children and young adults,
with sexual predators surfing social networking sites in search of
potential victims and cyber bullies sending threatening and anonymous
messages," said New Jersey Attorney General Anne Milgram.

Legal authorities have long been seeking greater controls for networking
sites to prevent predators from using them to contact children.

"We thank the attorneys general for a thoughtful and constructive
conversation on Internet safety," MySpace Chief Security Officer Hemanshu
Nigam said in a written statement. "This is an industrywide challenge,
and we must all work together to create a safer Internet."

He said the agreement includes measures "to provide a safer online
experience for teens, and we look forward to sharing our ongoing safety
innovations with other companies."

Among other measures, MySpace agreed to:

* Allow parents to submit children's e-mail addresses to MySpace to
prevent anyone from misusing the addresses to set up profiles.

* Make the default setting "private" for 16- and 17-year-old users.

* Respond within 72 hours to complaints about inappropriate content and devote more staff and resources to classify photographs and discussion groups.

* Strengthen software to find underage users.

* Create a high school section for users under 18 years old.

Investigators have increasingly examined MySpace, Facebook.com and other sites where people post information and images and invite contact from other people.

New York investigators said they set up Facebook profiles last year as 12- to 14-year olds and were quickly contacted by other users looking for sex.

The multistate investigation of the sites - announced last year - was aimed at putting together measures to protect minors and remove pornographic material, but lawsuits were possible, officials said.

EU Launches New Probes Against Microsoft

The European Commission, fresh from a major court victory over Microsoft, launched new antitrust investigations into the software giant on Monday, on suspicion it abused its market dominance.

Brussels will see whether Microsoft broke competition rules to help its Web browser and its Office and Outlook products, after complaints from Norwegian Web browser company Opera and a coalition of technology firms including IBM.

The move goes to the heart of the company's lucrative near-monopoly over personal computer operating systems, word processing, spreadsheets and office collaboration software.

The Commission is asking if Microsoft used the same tactics to hamper rivals that the European Union's second-highest court found illegal in September, in the culmination of a 6-year antitrust investigation.

The Commission, Europe's top competition regulator, made no new charges against Microsoft but said it "will further investigate the case as a matter of priority."

Microsoft said it would cooperate fully. "We are committed to ensuring that Microsoft is in full compliance with European law and court obligations," it said in a statement.

The technology coalition, the European Committee for Interoperable Systems (ECIS), wants rival word processors such as Open Office to run smoothly with Office, so documents can be exchanged across formats without losing any data.

"If the Commission cracks down, it opens up both Office and the Windows operating system monopolies to real competition," said Thomas Vinje, a lawyer for ECIS. It would also mean companies could use Linux computers that ran Office rivals, he added.

ECIS also wants Microsoft to provide data so the e-mail program Outlook and the Exchange Server which works with it can run smoothly with rival products. For now, users must rely on Outlook and Exchange to collaborate on such things as organizing meetings.

Finally, ECIS wants to ensure Internet applications from Google and other companies, so-called "cloud computing," will continue to work on any operating system.

Opera says Microsoft ensures rival Web browsers are not fully compatible with its Internet Explorer, and argues the U.S. firm should follow Internet standards which Microsoft itself helped develop. It also argues Microsoft has tied its Internet Explorer Web browser to Windows.

U.S. courts have found that Microsoft used illegal tactics to shut out rival Web browsers but Internet Explorer has remained a part of Windows.

Opera's complaint is based on the Commission's landmark 2004 ruling, upheld by the EU court last year, that Microsoft illegally tied audiovisual software to Windows. The court also found Microsoft failed to provide information needed for server software used by office workers for printing and signing on.

Microsoft has paid more than 778 million euros ($1.16 billion) in EU fines and may face more.

FCC Investigation of Net Neutrality a Good Start

On Monday, the Federal Communications Commission announced that it is opening three separate inquiries into whether the data management practices of broadband Internet service providers and mobile phone carriers unfairly favor some customers over others.

The move comes after the FCC received petitions from a variety of free speech organizations and more than 20,000 letters from individuals concerned about the concept of "net neutrality." The complaints were sparked by news that Comcast was discriminating against BitTorrent traffic over its networks, and that Verizon Wireless refused access to its network to a pro-choice group offering text message alerts to interested individuals (after a public outcry, Verizon reversed itself the following day).

Comcast has repeatedly said that it is not discriminating against any particular type of traffic, but instead is engaged in "reasonable traffic management" designed to prevent specific individuals from using a disproportionate amount of network resources. Free speech advocates are concerned that traffic shaping tools can be used to subtly (or not so subtly) restrict the speech of certain groups or individuals. Free speech groups are also worried that if left unchecked, traffic shaping will create an economically tiered Internet.

Jen Howard, assistant director of communications for Free Press, one of the public interest groups petitioning the FCC, said that the group is pleased that the FCC has launched its investigation, but was hoping that the Commission would do more.

"For right now," Howard said, "the FCC has opened it up for public comment. That's important; it's good to involve the public in the debate and start the debate about how and when ISPs are allowed to shape Internet traffic."

But Howard said that Free Press was disappointed that the FCC did not take immediate steps to prevent Comcast and other ISPs from restricting traffic flow. "We asked FCC to issue an injunction against any blocking," Howard said, "until the policy matters are more thoroughly investigated. But that hasn't happened, so we're concerned that companies will continue investing in data management systems that are unfairly limiting traffic flow."

In addition to pushing for an investigation by the FCC, Free Press and other groups have been aggressively lobbying Congress and the presidential candidates to take action on the net neutrality issue. Howard said that a number of politicians in both the Senate and the House are working on protective legislation. "In Congress," she said, "there's real energy for protecting innovation in this country."

While the Free Press cannot endorse any particular politicians or candidates, communication director Craig Aaron did say that there is a clear split between the two parties in their attitudes towards this issue. "All the Democratic presidential candidates were on record as supporting net neutrality," Aaron said. "On the Republican side, Governor Mike Huckabee has said some supportive things. John McCain voted against net neutrality in 2006, and none of the remainder have addressed the issue."

Yahoo To Support OpenID Single Sign-on

People with a Yahoo user name and password will be able to use that ID information to access non-Yahoo Web sites that support the OpenID 2.0 digital identity framework, reducing the amount of different log-in information people need to create, remember and enter online.

Already, almost 10,000 Web sites support OpenID, an open framework available for free to end users and Web site operators alike, according to the OpenID Foundation.

Yahoo's move will triple the number of OpenID accounts to 368 million by adding its 248 million active registered users to the rolls, the company said Thursday.

OpenID addresses one of several issues related to giving people more control of their online activities. Other groups are focusing on data portability, to let people move around the data and content they create online, so that they don't have to enter it manually in, say, every social-networking site they sign up for.

Yet other initiatives, like Google's OpenSocial, aim to create standard interfaces so that developers can create applications that run in multiple social-networking sites, instead of having to rewrite the same application multiple times for every site.

For all of these initiatives, it's critical for major Internet players to get involved, so that the benefits of standard technology and methods

developed by groups like OpenID can have a real-world impact.

Unsurprisingly, in Thursday's statement, Scott Kveton, the OpenID Foundation's chairman, hailed Yahoo's support as a crucial validation of the framework that will help spur its adoption by other large Web site operators.

Other major players that have expressed interest and gotten involved in varying degrees with OpenID include Google, Six Apart, AOL, Sun, Novell, and Microsoft.

Yahoo's announcement doesn't come as a complete surprise, since signs that it had been working on an OpenID implementation had surfaced. For example, a short message in the domain me.yahoo.com indicating the company would act as an identity provider for OpenID was spotted last week.

Yahoo participated in the development of version 2.0 of the OpenID framework, which the company said provides new security features. Yahoo users who log in to third-party OpenID sites should know that the log-in process doesn't reveal e-mail or instant-message addresses, Yahoo said Thursday.

Yahoo's initial OpenID service will be available in public beta on Jan. 30 and the company is working with several partners, including Plaxo, so that the Yahoo ID will work on their sites that day.

10,000 Web Sites Rigged with Advanced Hack Attack

A sophisticated hacking scheme seen early last year is affecting an increasing number of Web servers, including one owned by a major online advertising company, the chief technology officer of Finjan Software said Monday.

It appears that a single gang is behind the attacks, since the malicious software it spreads is storing login and password details on one server in Spain, said Yuval Ben-Itzhak. Finjan is trying to get the ISP (Internet service provider) to shut it down, he said.

A Web server of an online advertising company that serves 14 million banner ads to other Web sites has also been hacked, Ben-Itzhak said. That means that the PC of anyone who visits a legitimate site hosting a malicious banner ad could potentially be infected if their computer isn't patched, he said.

"You can imagine the magnitude," Ben-Itzhak said.

Ben-Itzhak declined to identify the company, but said Finjan contacted it last week about the problem. At least 10,000 other Web sites were serving up malicious code in December, although Finjan stopped counting, Ben-Itzhak said.

The latest problems show that the power of this particular hacking gang appears to be growing since it was identified early last year. At that time, Finjan said it found a number of Web servers that had been hacked in order to serve malicious code to visitors. The attackers used several methods to hide their tracks and infect a maximum number of PCs.

The attack is structured using JavaScript so that the malicious code is only served up once to a PC, which helps avoid repeated tests by security scanning services.

Further, hackers also record the IP (Internet Protocol) addresses of crawlers used by search engines and reputation services, which evaluate the risk in visiting certain Web sites. Those page requests are then served with legitimate content.

The JavaScript that starts the exploit also dynamically changes, which makes it more difficult to detect with security software, Finjan said. Once hacked, a Web server hosting hundreds of Web sites will serve up the attack code.

The code looks for at least 13 software vulnerabilities in order to place a Trojan horse program on the PC.

The hackers also regularly change the vulnerabilities that the attack looks for in order to increase the chances a computer can become infected, Ben-Itzhak said. After the PC is infected, the malware can start collecting data on the machine, such as documents and passwords. Finjan has dubbed the attack "random js Trojan."

Finjan asserts that antivirus software isn't as effective since the attack code can change so frequently. The company has a browser plug-in, called SecureBrowser, that analyzes the content of a Web page as it's being served, looking for traces of malicious code and then warning users. It also sells an enterprise-level appliance with scanning technology.

Finjan isn't the only company with that kind of technology. Exploit Prevention Labs, which was recently acquired by security company AVG, also has a product called LinkScanner that analyzes Web page content for malware, and McAfee has a service called SiteAdvisor that ranks the health of a Web site. All three companies offer free versions of their products.

FCC Launches Probe into Comcast Traffic Blocking

The FCC (Federal Communications Commission) has launched an investigation into Comcast's alleged blocking of P2P (peer-to-peer) and other applications on its network. The cable giant acknowledged that it had received a request for information from the FCC.

"We did receive a letter from the FCC asking us to respond in writing to the Free Press- Media Access Project complaint," said Comcast spokeswoman Sena Fitzmaurice. The letter is "different and separate from the three dockets that the FCC has opened asking for public comment on various broadband network processes and the Verizon text messaging issue," Fitzmaurice said.

Comcast's response in writing is due by Jan. 25. Free Press and the Media Access Project in November filed a petition with the agency alleging, "Comcast is engaging in substantial network neutrality violations. Specifically, Comcast is secretly degrading innovative protocols used for transporting and sharing large files."

The FCC on Monday opened up a public comment period on the petition. The public is invited to comment specifically on whether Comcast's degradation of P2P traffic violates the FCC's Internet Policy Statement and whether Comcast's P2P throttling constitutes "reasonable network management," for which there is an exception.

The public comment period is open until Feb. 13 for initial comments, and until Feb. 28 for reply comments. Fitzmaurice said Comcast hasn't decided whether it will make a comment.

Additionally, the FCC will address a petition by video service Vuze, asking for clarification of the term "reasonable network management." Vuze relies on the BitTorrent P2P system to distribute its content and claims its business is being injured by Comcast's practices.

Yet another inquiry concerns allegations that Verizon initially blocked text messages from NARAL Pro-Choice America from its network. Verizon later allowed the messages. The question here is whether text messages are subject to the FCC's rules banning carriers from discriminating against certain content.

"We're obviously pleased that the FCC is taking some action," Craig Aaron, communications director for Free Press, said in an interview. "This announcement is the first step down that road" of stopping Comcast from blocking traffic, he added, emphasizing the need for quick action.

"The longer they wait, the more entrenched these practices become," Aaron said. "While we're certainly pleased the FCC has started the process, it doesn't mean anything if they drag their heels or they don't take action. The key here is that they see it through."

As to the question of whether Comcast's P2P throttling may qualify for an exception as reasonable network management, "We don't think there's anything reasonable about [it]," Aaron said. While the Vuze petition asks for clarity on the definition of the term, "We think the language is clear, and that this is a clear Net neutrality violation, even under the loose FCC definition."

The FCC is framing the Verizon issue as one of categorization: Is text-messaging a phone service or an information service? Depending on the answer, different laws may apply. Whatever the answer, Aaron said, the result should be the same. "However you define it, it shouldn't be tolerated under any circumstances. We're looking to the FCC to take quick decisive action to all of these would-be gatekeepers," he concluded.

Time Warner Links Web Prices With Usage

Time Warner Cable will experiment with a new pricing structure for high-speed Internet access later this year, charging customers based on how much data they download, a company spokesman said Wednesday.

The company, the second-largest cable provider in the United States, will start a trial in Beaumont, Texas, in which it will sell new Internet customers tiered levels of service based on how much data they download per month, rather than the usual fixed-price packages with unlimited downloads.

Company spokesman Alex Dudley said the trial was aimed at improving the network performance by making it more costly for heavy users of large downloads. Dudley said that a small group of super-heavy users of downloads, around 5 percent of the customer base, can account for up to 50 percent of network capacity.

Dudley said he did not know what the pricing tiers would be nor the download limits. He said the heavy users were likely using the network to download large amounts of video, most likely in high definition.

It was not clear when exactly the trial would begin, but Dudley said it would likely be around the second quarter. The tiered pricing would only affect new customers in Beaumont, not existing ones.

Jobs Reveals Tiny New Laptop

Apple Inc. Chief Executive Steve Jobs took the wraps off a super-slim new laptop at the Macworld trade show on Tuesday, unveiling a personal computer less than an inch thick that turns on the moment it's opened.

Jobs also confirmed the consumer electronics company's foray into online movie rentals, revealing an alliance with all six major movie studios to offer films over high-speed Internet connections within 30 days after they're released on DVD.

Always a showman, Jobs unwound the string on a standard-sized manila office envelope and slid out the ultra-thin MacBook Air notebook computer to coos and peals of laughter from fans at the conference.

At its beefiest, the new computer is .76 inches thick; at its thinnest, it's .16 inches, he said. It comes standard with an 80-gigabyte hard drive, with the option of a 64GB flash-based solid state drive as an upgrade.

The machine doesn't come with a built-in optical drive for reading CDs and DVDs, a feature Jobs says consumers won't miss because they can download movies and music over the Internet and access the optical drives on other PCs and Macs to install new software. They can buy an external drive, however, that will retail for $99.

Trading in Apple stock was heavy Tuesday, the first day of the Macworld Conference & Expo in San Francisco. Shares fell $9.74, or 5.5 percent, to close at $169.04.

Caris & Co. analyst Shebly Seyrafi said the MacBook Air's price tag "may have been higher than people would have hoped for." Investors also may be "incrementally" concerned that Apple's iPhone was not updated so that it can connect to faster cellular networks, he said.

The new laptop, which has a 13.3-inch screen and full-sized laptop keyboard, will cost $1,799 when it goes on sale in two weeks, though Apple is taking orders now. The company's Web site is already touting the machine. The price is competitive with other laptops in its market segment.

The machine helps fortify Apple's already-sizzling Macintosh product

lineup and burnish its polished image as a purveyor of cool.

Apple's Macintosh business hit record sales of 7 million units in the company's fiscal 2007, up more than 30 percent from the previous year.

After hovering for years with a 2 percent to 3 percent share of the personal computer market in the United States, Apple's slice has grown to almost 8 percent, making it the nation's third-largest PC vendor, according to the latest figures from market researcher Gartner Inc.

Other revelations during Jobs' speech reflected the Cupertino-based company's intensifying efforts to push deeper into consumers' living rooms with technologies that blend Internet technology into home entertainment devices.

The movie-rental announcement capped months of speculation that an Apple movie rental service was in the offing. The service launched Tuesday in the United States and will roll out internationally later this year.

Apple will have more than 1,000 movies for online rental through iTunes by the end of February, with prices of $2.99 for older movies and $3.99 for new releases. Users can watch instantly over a broadband Internet connection, or download and keep the movie for 30 days while having 24 hours to finish the movie once it's started.

Apple is partnering with 20th Century Fox, Warner Brothers, Walt Disney, Paramount, Universal and Sony on the service, which will work on Macs, Windows-based machines, iPhones, iPods or Apple TV set-top boxes.

Jobs cut the price of Apple TV from $299 to $229 and announced new software that allows users to order movies through the device and play them directly on their TV sets, eliminating the need to route the content through a personal computer first. The software is free to existing Apple TV customers and will be included in new Apple TV devices shipping in two weeks.

Jobs also unveiled a string of new features for the iPhone, showing how users of the combination iPod-cell phone-Internet surfing device can now pinpoint their location on Web maps, text-message multiple people at once and customize their home screens.

Jobs also said Apple has sold 4 million iPhones during their first 200 days on sale.

The crowd applauded when Jobs demonstrated mapping upgrades to the iPhone. Other features rolling out Tuesday included the ability to switch around icons on the iPhones home screen. Users also can create up to nine home screens.

In addition, Jobs announced a new product called Time Capsule that allows Mac users to back up their data wirelessly on a 500-gigabyte drive that will sell for $299 and another with a terabyte of storage that will sell for $499.

Jobs also unveiled new software for the iPod Touch music player. New models will be able to process e-mail and perform new mapping functions.

Mac Security Program a Scam?

Some Macintosh users have encountered a security program whose function and Web site have the tell-tale signs of a scam.

Visitors to the Web site selling the program, called MacSweeper, are offered a free security scan of their computers. The scan, which only works on Macs, highlights supposed security problems with the computers. It offers to remove the problems with the purchase of a US$39.99 lifetime subscription.

But the awkward English on the program's Web site, and the way the program operates, have raised doubts over its legitimacy, users and security researchers say.

"The imbibed set of features locates all the junk and useless data on your computer and deletes them to reclaim the wasted space," according to the pitch on MacSweeper's home page.

Security company F-Securewrote on Tuesday that the program, called MacSweeper, may be the first rogue application for Macs.

Windows machines have been more frequently targeted by similar software, sometimes labeled "scareware" since users are warned their computers will be in danger unless they purchase the software. Among the more notorious scareware for PCs is Winfixer, also known by the aliases ErrorSafe, WinAntiVirus and DriveCleaner.

The MacSweeper Web page is hosted on a server in Kiev, Ukraine, said Patrik Runald, security response manager for F-Secure, who is based in Malaysia. Information on the site about MacSweeper's company, Kiwi Software, has been plagiarized from Symantec's Web page, Runald said.

"They just ripped that information straight off there," Runald said.

The same text is also used on Cleanator.com, which sells a Windows-compatible version of the same kind of program, Runald said. Another security vendor, Sophos, classifies Cleanator as a "potentially unwanted program."

Once MacSweeper is running on a Mac it will often pick odd items, such as language files, and label them as being a privacy risk, Runald said.

In at least one instance an F-Secure researcher visited the MacSweeper site and clicked a button labeled "Free scan." The scan highlighted Mac-related problems, even though the researcher was using a PC.

MacSweeper doesn't use any tricks to get onto a machine other than trying to persuade users to download it, Runald said. Nonetheless, F-Secure typically contacts Finland's Computer Emergency Response Team when it finds scams such as MacSweeper, Runald said.

A user on one of Apple's discussion boards wrote that their Safari browser kept redirecting to the MacSweeper site, a sign that malicious scripts may be involved.

"If I click on anything it'll try downloading the software," the person wrote. "How do i get rid of this? It's really annoying. I don't want it, and I'd wish it would leave me alone."

More than half of teachers in a survey said they thought plagiarism from the Internet is a problem.

Some students who steal essays wholesale from the Web, they said, are so lazy they don't even bother to take the adverts off the cut-and-pasted text.

Fifty-eight percent of the teachers interviewed in the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) questionnaire had come across plagiarism among their sixth-form pupils.

Gill Bullen from Itchen College in Southampton for example said pieces handed in by two students were identical and "significantly better than either of them could have done."

"Not only that, the essays given in didn't quite answer the title question I had set."

A teacher from Leeds said: "I had one piece of work so blatantly 'cut and pasted' that it still contained adverts from the Web page."

Connie Robinson from Stockton Riverside College, Stockton on Tees, said: "With less able students it is easy to spot plagiarism as the writing style changes mid-assignment, but with more able students it is sometimes necessary for tutors to carry out Internet research to identify the source of the plagiarism."

Mary Bousted, general secretary of the ATL, said: "Teachers are struggling under a mountain of cut-and-pasting to spot whether work was the student's own or plagiarism."

She called for robust policies to combat plagiarism, and asked for help from exam boards and the government in providing resources and techniques to detect cheats.

The 58 percent of teachers who said plagiarism was a problem estimated over a quarter of work returned by their pupils included plagiarism.

But there was another side.

"I have found once students clearly understand what plagiarism is, its consequences and how to reference correctly so they can draw on published works, plagiarism becomes less of a problem," said Diana Baker from Emmanuel College, Durham.

"I think the majority of students who engage in plagiarism do it more out of ignorance than the desire to cheat.

They really want to succeed on their own merit."

Computer Can Help Your Dog Communicate

Hungarian scientists are working on computer software analyzing dog barks that could allow people to better recognize dogs' basic emotions, Hungarian ethologist Csaba Molnar said.

Molnar and his colleagues at Budapest's ELTE University have tested software which distinguishes the emotional reaction of 14 dogs of the Hungarian Mudi herding breed to six situations: When the dog is alone, when it sees a ball, it fights, it plays, it encounters a stranger or it goes for a walk.

"A possible commercial application could be a device for dog-human communication," the scientist told Reuters.

The computer correctly recognized the emotional reaction of the dogs based on their barks and yelps in 43 percent of the cases. People had judged correctly in 40 percent of cases.

Scientists said the software could be improved.

Molnar said the Hungarian scientists' research provided further proof that different types of dog barks convey messages humans can understand even if they had no experience with dogs.

White House Hopefuls Wield Potent Internet Weapon

The business of US politics is booming on the Internet, as 2008 White House hopefuls rake in donations, organize, and get their message out, hoping that online efforts will yield real-world votes.

Campaigns also provide tools to help supporters create do-it-yourself fundraising and mobilization sites, and have set up shop on "social networking" portals where young voters can compare tastes on pop music or politicians.

A recent poll by the non-partisan Pew Research Center that tracks public opinion found that roughly a quarter of the US public regularly turns to the World Wide Web for White House race news -- less than television, but still double the number from 2004 and nearly triple 2000 levels.

"Increasingly, the conversation about the campaign is taking place online, and you ignore it at your peril," according to Mike Feldman, a former senior adviser to Al Gore during the vice president's 2000 presidential campaign.

The number soars to 42 percent for people under 30 years old, who are also more likely to use "social networking" sites like MySpace.com or Facebook.com to promote a politician as they would a favorite movie or music group.

"You become the salesman, in a way. If I think the world of Joe, and Joe says on his site that he really likes (Republican candidate) John McCain, I might go give McCain another look," said David Almacy, former Internet communications director for the White House under US President George W. Bush.

Feldman, who chuckled that Gore's bare-bones Web site was "cutting edge" in 2000, said that some candidates hope to mimic the excitement of

Democrat Howard Dean's Web-driven presidential run in 2004 but avoid fizzling out as he did.

Long-shot Republican White House hopeful Ron Paul grabbed headlines when his web-centered donation drives - known to his supporters as "money bombs" - helped scoop up roughly 20 million dollars in the final months of 2007.

On the other side, Democrats point to presidential candidate Barack Obama's efforts to use the Internet to counter rival Hillary Clinton's perceived advantage in traditional fundraising and get-out-the-vote operations.

As of January 3, 60 percent of the 500,000 people giving to Obama did so online, while campaign-provided online tools had fostered the creation of 6,000 active volunteer groups and 20,000 fundraising Web pages, the campaign says.

"It's amazing how capable and energetic people can be when you give them the tools," Joe Rospars, the campaign's "new media" director, told AFP.

But while ever-larger swathes of the US public are using the Internet to follow the campaign, give money, and rally their friends to favorite candidates, experts warn against seeing it as a campaign cure-all.

"It's unforgivable not to be in that space, but they're not going to win because they are in that space," said Almacy.

"It's just a tool, period. Learn its abilities and limitations, and then incorporate it where possible in all aspects of a campaign," said Josh Margulies, a co-founder of the successful Internet-driven effort to bring retired general Wesley Clark into the 2004 presidential campaign.

Margulies said that the Internet makes mass mailings much easier; enables campaigns to fine-tune their message and pitch different ideas to different audiences; and makes it "absurdly easy" to donate money.

But a candidate cannot "assume that, just because I'm willing to click three buttons and send you a few bucks (dollars), I'm willing, also, to set my alarm and get out of bed early enough (on election day)," he warned.

On the communications front, campaigns looking for a way around the scrutiny of traditional media can also rely on electronic mail and friendly or independent sites, explained Almacy.

But it's not all poll standings and position papers, or even all positive, as Republican George Allen learned when he lost his Senate bid after an amateur video of him using the word "macaca," widely seen as an ethnic slur, hit the Internet.

Take A Stand? Hurl A Candidate? Internet Can Help

Unsure which White House hopeful most closely shares your views? Looking to throw Hillary Clinton - virtually, of course - at a friend? The Internet is ready to inform and indulge.

The number of people getting political news from the World Wide Web has doubled since the 2004 race, and tripled since 2000, according to a recent survey by the non-partisan Pew Research Center that tracks public opinion.

There's even a site, www.techpresident.com, that tracks how candidates use the World Wide Web – and how potential voters are, in turn, generating online content that may shape the November 4 election.

On the "social networking" portal www.facebook.com, voters can track down poll standings or position papers, proclaim their support for a campaign, or harmlessly hurl a cartoon candidate onto a fellow user's personal site.

On www.electoralcompass.com, voters answer 36 questions on issues including Iraq, global warming, taxes, and gun rights to see which candidate's views most closely match their own or compare their answers to the field of hopefuls.

The video-sharing site www.youtube.com is a hugely popular spot for campaigns to broadcast their latest speeches - but some of the most popular content comes from individuals using simple, cheaply available technology.

Campaigns sometimes find unlikely competition: Roughly 230,000 people have watched Democrat Barack Obama's January 3 Iowa caucus victory speech, but 5.2 million have seen the risque music-video style "I've Got a Crush on Obama" in the seven months since it was posted.

Over on www.opensecrets.org, readers can search a giant database of who gives, and who gets, political donations that are the lifeblood of a presidential campaign whose cost is expected to top one billion dollars.

The good news for people prone to mistyping Internet addresses is that www.whitehouse.com - US President George W. Bush is at .gov - is no longer a lavishly produced pornographic site but a political video hub.

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